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ABSTRACT

To investigate the extent to which graduate level education students found a required educational research course helpful, a questionnaire elicited occupation information about the student and about when the course was taken, the degree pursued, and degree attained. Additionally, the questionnaire asked the extent to which the course was considered helpful (1) in relation to other courses in the degree program, (2) in developing the necessary background to evaluate research reports, and (3) on the job. From a population of 825 former Memphis State University students who had taken the course over a 5-year period under 1 instructor (who maintained files of former students' names and addresses), 693 were found to be accessible. Of 535 responses received (a return of 77 percent), 64 percent of the respondents indicated education as their profession--52 supervisors/administrators and 288 teachers. This study focused on those 340 educators. Frequencies, t-test, and chi-square analyses were made in order to address the three questions central to the study. Overall, the majority of educators expressed the view that the course was helpful to them. Although both groups felt the necessary background on how to evaluate research reports had been developed, the statistical analysis showed that administrators regarded the course as significantly more helpful, both in relation to their degree program and on the job, than did classroom teachers. Two figures and one table are in the text; the appendixes contain the course syllabus and survey questionnaire. (MLF)

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Teachers and Administrators: Differences in Attitudes Regarding the Helpfulness of a Research Course

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Research Methodology

Paper Presented at the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association

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Teachers and Administrators: Differences in Attitudes Regarding the Helpfulness of a Research Course

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which graduate level students whose stated profession is education found a required educational research course helpful. Three questions were central to the purpose of the study: (1) the extent to which the course was considered helpful in relation to other courses in the degree program, (2) the extent to which it was considered helpful in developing the necessary background to evaluate research reports, and (3) the extent to which it was of help on the job. The focus of the present study is drawn from a larger, more comprehensive study which is in progress.

Method

Instrument

A Questionnaire was constructed to elicit information about sex, occupation, when the course itself was taken, when in the student's program, degree pursued then, and degree attained. An accompanying Opinionnaire elicited scaled responses to helpfulness of the course content as specified in the syllabus and relative to the individual's degree program and occupation. Using Cronbach's Alpha the reliability of the instrument was found to be .85. Content and face validity were addressed in that statements in the instrument were drawn from course objectives as stated in the syllabus (see Appendix A) and that six instructors who have taught the course using that syllabus reviewed the instrument (see Appendix B). Course content was also in line with several of the most widely-adopted textbooks as reported by Doak (1982).

Sample

The population from which the sample was drawn was those students who had taken the course over a five-year period under one instructor who had elected to maintain files of former students' names and addresses. From among this population of 825 former students, 693 were found to be accessible. Of 535 responses received (a return of 77% from among the accessible population), 64% of the respondents indicated education as their profession--52 supervisors/administrators and 288 teachers. This study focused on these 340 educators who comprised two of nine reported occupational categories.

Data Analysis

Frequencies, *t* test, and chi square analyses were made in order to address the three questions central to the study. In order to determine whether a systematic relationship existed between educators' reactions toward the helpfulness of the course, supervisors' and teachers' responses were compared.

Results

Overall, the majority of educators expressed the view that the course was helpful or very helpful to them. No statistical significance was found between supervisors' and teachers' attitudes concerning the helpfulness of the course in developing the necessary background to evaluate research reports. However, a significance was found with respect to the other two questions (see Table 1): more supervisors than expected by chance reported the course was very helpful--and more teachers said it was not helpful. Proportionally more supervisors (43%) than teachers (25%) reported the course as very helpful in relation to their degree programs ($\chi^2 = 7.26$; $p = .027$); on

the other hand, only 12% of the supervisors indicated the course as not helpful in relation to their programs, but 18% of the teachers did so.

Table 1

Educators' Attitudes Regarding Helpfulness of Course

Helpfulness of Course...	Supervisors	Teachers	χ^2	df	p
... In Relation to Other Courses in the Degree Program			7.26	2	.027
Very Helpful	22[a]	71			
Helpful	23	164			
Not Helpful	6	50			
... In Developing Background to Evaluate Research Reports			1.64	2	.44 *
Very Helpful	18	105			
Helpful	33	165			
Not Helpful	1	17			
... On the Job			11.03	2	.004
Very Helpful	14	39			
Helpful	29	145			
Not Helpful	8	103			

[a] Missing values in variables may be reflected in totals * Not significant

Further, proportionally more supervisors (28%) viewed the course as very helpful on the job, whereas fewer teachers (14%) held that view (χ^2 = 11.03; p = .004); conversely, only 16% of the supervisors viewed the course as not helpful, but 36% of the teachers indicated the course was not helpful to them on the job. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate contrasting proportions in the results of the study. A subsequent t

test revealed a difference (t = 1.74; p = .08) between the total Opinionnaire scores of the supervisors/administrators and the classroom teachers--a difference which is indicative of a need for further investigation.

Figure 1

Proportions of Educators
Who Said the Course Was Very Helpful or Helpful...

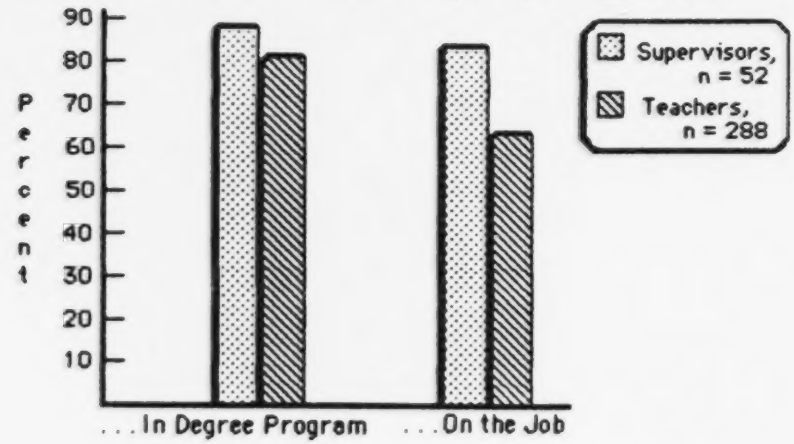
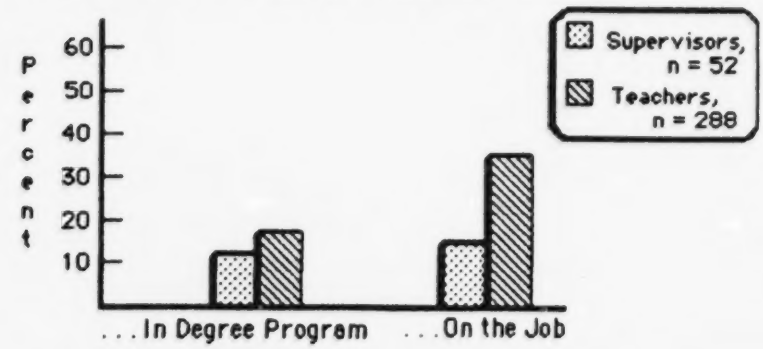


Figure 2

Proportions of Educators
Who Said the Course Was Not Helpful...



Discussion

Generalization from the results is limited by nonrandom sampling. However, the course content as outlined in the syllabus was in line with widely-adopted textbooks used in comparable courses at other graduate institutions.

Since Introduction to Educational Research was a required course in the degree programs of all respondents whose major was education, their responses regarding the value and helpfulness of the course are highly significant. A graduate course in the fundamentals of educational research is required by many colleges of education at the master's, specialist, and/or doctoral levels. Given the amount of publicity recently afforded public education and the national emphasis on education reform, student achievement, and teacher effectiveness, it is imperative that time educators spend enrolled in courses--usually evening classes following a full day on the job--be relevant, meaningful, and helpful; since administrators and teachers spend time in direct contact with students, they are at the level where knowledge gained through educational research efforts needs to be utilized. Although both groups felt the necessary background to evaluate research reports had been developed, that statistical analysis showed administrators as regarding the course as more helpful than did classroom teachers suggests a need for further research to identify specific, relevant variables.

Reference

Doak, J. L. (1982, November). A survey of the graduate introductory research class. Paper presented at the eleventh annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Appendix A

Department of Foundations of Education

College of Education

Memphis State University

Course No. EDRS 7521

Name of Course Introduction to Educational Research

Semester Hours Credit 3

Prerequisites: Graduate Status

Catalogue Description:

> Introduction to major concepts and processes underlying educational research. Focus on knowledge necessary for critically appraising published research and preparing students as research consumers.

The course has the following objectives:

1. To develop an understanding of the overall concept of research - to be able to answer the question, "What constitutes research?"

2. To develop a familiarity with the general strategies of historical, descriptive, and experimental research to the point of being able to classify a research report as representative of one of these general types and to identify the problem which was researched.

3. To acquire a general knowledge concerning educational research terminology.

4. To extend familiarity with library facilities, particularly abstracts and research-oriented periodicals, by reading assignments in such abstracts and periodicals.

5. To become acquainted with the methods of ascertaining the present state of knowledge concerning an area to be researched as well as providing the necessary background to evaluate research reports.

6. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the importance of hypotheses in the development of research studies.

7. To be able to write problem statements for research proposals.

8. To set up, as a term project, a research proposal including such items as Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Hypotheses, Definitions of Terms, Assumptions, Limitations, Review of Related Literature, Procedures, Method of Data Collection, Treatment of Data, and Analysis of Data.

9. To develop an understanding of descriptive statistical concepts (measures of central tendency, variability, and relationship).

10. To develop an understanding of inferential statistical concepts (t-test, and chi square) commonly used to test hypotheses. (Emphasis placed on concepts rather than proficiency in performing statistical computations.)

OUTLINE OF CONTENT

I. Overview of Educational Research as Problem Solving
   - A. Definitions, purposes, uses, limitations, and examples of research
   - B. Identification of areas of need for research efforts in education
   - C. Attitude and method of Science, especially research
   - D. Basic criteria of educational research

II. Problem, hypothesis, basic assumptions, limitations, purpose, and deduced consequences
   - A. Formulation, statement, and restatement
   - B. Interaction of problem, hypothesis, and assumptions
   - C. Analysis of related literature
   - D. Validity, reliability, and pertinence of the research

III. Research Design
   - A. Population and sampling
   - B. Types of research - similarities, differences, strengths, and limitations: historical, descriptive, experimental, ex post facto
   - C. Identification and control of variables - rationale and methods

IV. Collection of Data
   - A. Questioning
   - B. Observation
   - C. Measurement

V. Analysis of Data
   - A. Statistical concepts, terminology, and tests commonly used to test hypotheses - identification of those terms commonly encountered in research reports will be emphasized. Emphasis will be placed on concepts rather than proficiency in performing statistical computations
   - B. Discussion and reporting of findings from the data

VI. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

VII. The Research Report
   - A. Communication: written - mechanics and style; publication
   - B. Oral reporting: interpretation and evaluation

Appendix B

EDRS 7521. Introduction to Educational Research: Questionnaire-Opinionnaire

Please circle the letter of your response to each of the following questions.

1. What is your sex? A. Male B. Female

2. Into which of the following categories does your occupation or profession most clearly belong?

   A. MANAGERIAL, PROFESSIONAL (Office Manager, Lawyer, Engineer, Physician, Registered Nurse)
   B. EDUCATION: SUPERVISION (Supervisor, Principal, Asst. Principal, Superintendent, Asst. Superintendent, Higher Education Supervision)
   C. EDUCATION: TEACHING (Elementary, Secondary, Higher Education, Technical School, Specialized Teaching Situation)
   D. TECHNICAL, SALES ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT (Computer Operator, Account Executive, Bank Teller, Company Employee)
   E. SERVICE (L.P.N., Child Care Worker, Social Worker, Policeman, Fireman, Church Worker)
   F. FARMING, FORESTRY (Farm Manager)
   G. CRAFTSMAN, REPAIRMAN (Mechanic, Carpenter)
   H. HOMEMAKER
   I. STUDENT
   J. MEMBER OF ARMED FORCES
   K. OTHER (Write in) _____

3. How long has it been since you took EDRS 7521, Introduction to Educational Research?

   A. 1 year or less
   B. 2 - 3 years
   C. 4 - 5 years

4. When in your graduate program did you take the course?

   A. Near the beginning
   B. About the middle
   C. Near the end

5. What degree were you working on when you took the course?

   A. Master's Degree
   B. Educational Specialist Degree
   C. Doctoral Degree
   D. No degree

6. What is the highest degree you now hold?

   A. Bachelor's
   B. Master's
   C. Specialist
   D. Doctorate

In the column to the right circle the letter which best reflects your response to each of the following questions. Circle V for Very Helpful, H for Helpful, and N for Not Helpful.

	Very Helpful	Helpful	Not Helpful
7. To what extent did you find this course helpful to you in relationship to the other courses you took in your degree program?	V	H	N
8. To what extent was this course helpful to you in deciding to take other courses in research?	V	H	N
9. To what extent did this course stimulate your interest in on-going research in your area of specialization?	V	H	N
10. To what extent did this course help you acquire a general knowledge concerning educational research terminology?	V	H	N
11. To what extent did this course help you become familiar with library facilities? (Location of research studies and journals, accessibility of research material, use of ERIC files)	V	H	N
12. To what extent did this course help you become familiar with research-oriented periodicals?	V	H	N
13. To what extent did this course help you develop the necessary background to evaluate research reports?	V	H	N
14. To what extent did this course help you become a more critical reader/listener?	V	H	N
15. To what extent did this course help you obtain a comprehensive understanding of the importance of hypotheses in the development of research studies?	V	H	N
16. To what extent did this course help you write problem statements for research proposals?	V	H	N
17. To what extent was this course helpful to you in developing an understanding of descriptive statistical concepts (measures of central tendency, variability, and correlation) and inferential statistical concepts (t-test and chi square)?	V	H	N
18. To what extent has this course been of help to you in your job?	V	H	N

19. Briefly indicate any modification you would recommend for this course.